

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

RESIDUE MANAGEMENT, SEASONAL

(Ac.)
CODE 344

DEFINITION

Managing the amount, orientation, and distribution of crop and other plant residues on the soil surface during a specified period of the year, while planting annual crops on a clean-tilled seedbed, or when growing biennial or perennial seed crops.

PURPOSES

- Reduce sheet and rill erosion.
- Reduce soil erosion from wind.
- Reduce off-site transport of sediment, nutrients, or pesticides.
- Manage snow to increase plant available moisture.
- Provide food and escape cover for wildlife.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to all cropland and other land where crops are grown.

Seasonal residue management includes managing residues of annual crops from harvest until the residue is:

- Buried by tillage for seedbed preparation;
- Removed by grazing; or
- Mechanically removed.

It also includes the management of residues from biennial or perennial seed crops from the time of seed harvest until regrowth begins the next season.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Residue shall be uniformly distributed over the entire field.

Combines or similar harvesting machines shall be equipped with spreaders capable of redistributing residues over at least 80 percent of the working width of the header.

Crop residues shall not be burned.

Additional Criteria to Reduce Sheet and Rill Erosion and Erosion from Wind

The amount and orientation of residue needed to reduce erosion within the soil loss tolerance (T) or any other planned soil loss objective shall be determined using current approved erosion prediction technology.

Partial removal of residue by means such as baling, grazing, or other harvest methods shall be limited to retain the amount needed to meet the erosion reduction objective. The remaining residue shall be maintained on the surface through periods when erosion has the potential to occur, or until planting, whichever occurs first. Erosion prediction estimates shall account for the effects of other practices in the conservation management system.

Any tillage that occurs during the management period shall be limited to methods that maintain the planned cover conditions.

Additional Criteria to Reduce Off-site Transport of Sediment, Nutrients or Pesticides.

The amount and orientation of residue required to reduce offsite movement of agricultural chemicals during the specified period shall be determined using the appropriate assessment tool(s) [Windows Pesticide Screening Tool (WIN-PST), Pesticide Screening Spreadsheet (PSS), erosion prediction technologies, or other recognized tools] for the site conditions.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact your Natural Resources Conservation Service [State Office](#) or visit the [electronic Field Office Technical Guide](#).

Additional Criteria to Manage Snow to Increase Plant-Available Moisture

Harvesting equipment shall be adjusted to leave standing stubble at least six inches tall. Stubble shall be maintained in a standing orientation over winter to trap and retain snow.

Any tillage that occurs during this period shall be limited to undercutting tools such as blades, sweeps, or similar implements that minimize residue flattening or burial.

Additional Criteria to Provide Food and Escape Cover for Wildlife

The amount of residue, height of the stubble, and length of the management period necessary for meeting habitat requirements for the target species or wildlife population shall be determined using an approved wildlife management plan.

Tillage operations shall be delayed until the end of the management period to maintain the food and cover value of the residue.

CONSIDERATIONS

Removal of plant residue by baling or grazing may have a negative impact on resources. These activities should not be performed without full evaluation of impacts on other resources.-

Production of adequate amounts of crop residue necessary for the proper functioning of this practice can be enhanced by selection of high residue producing crops and crop varieties, by the use of cover crops, and by adjustment of plant populations and row spacing.

When planting in a low residue seedbed, completing tillage and planting in a single operation, or by performing primary tillage no more than three days before planting can minimize exposure to erosion; and in limited moisture areas, can conserve moisture for germination.

Leaving standing stubble taller than the six inch minimum will increase the amount of snow trapped.

Leaving one or two rows of unharvested crop standing at intervals across the field can enhance the value of residue for wildlife habitat. Unharvested crop rows have the greatest value when they are adjacent to other cover types, such as grassy or brushy areas or woodland.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for establishment and operation of this practice shall be prepared for each field or treatment unit according to the Criteria described in this standard.

Specifications shall be recorded using approved job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable methods.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE (O&M)

No O&M requirements, national in scope, have been identified for this practice.